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CLMPTO

May 25, 2005

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Claims 1-14 (canceled)

14. A method for using a cable distribution network to bypass a local exchange carrier network, comprising the steps of:
  - intercepting a telecommunications transmission from a customer location;
  - determining whether the telecommunications transmission is of a type which is to be handled by a cable television distribution network;
  - bypassing a local exchange carrier network by transferring the telecommunications transmission to the cable television distribution network only if the transmission is determined to be of the type which is to be handled by the cable television distribution network;
  - receiving the telecommunications transmission at a headend switch; and,
  - using the headend switch to switch the telecommunications transmission to a destination.
15. The method in accordance with claim 14, wherein the step of intercepting a telecommunications transmission comprises intercepting an outbound telephone call.
16. The method in accordance with claim 14, wherein the determining step comprises determining whether the telecommunications transmission is a long distance call or a local call.
17. The method in accordance with claim 14, wherein the step of intercepting a telecommunications transmission comprises intercepting a data transmission.
18. The method in accordance with claim 14, wherein the step of transferring the telecommunications transmission to the cable television distribution network comprises encapsulating an address associated with the customer into the transmission.

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19. The method in accordance with claim 18, wherein the step of encapsulating an address associated with the customer into the transmission comprises converting the transmission into a virtual message format transmission protocol transmission.
20. The method in accordance with claim 19, wherein the step of converting the transmission into a virtual message format transmission protocol transmission comprises placing a wrapper around another transmission format.
21. The method in accordance with claim 14, wherein the step of using the headend switch to switch the outbound call to a destination comprises switching a long-distance call to a long-distance carrier.
22. The method in accordance with claim 14, wherein the destination is an interexchange carrier network.
23. The method in accordance with claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
detecting a failure on the cable distribution network; and,  
routing the telecommunications transmissions to the local exchange carrier in response to the detection of a failure on the cable distribution network.
24. The method in accordance with claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
storing records of user address encapsulated information in a database at a cable television head end.
25. A system for bypassing a local exchange carrier network and directing telecommunications transmissions to a cable distribution network, comprising:

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a bypass device installed at a customer location for intercepting a telecommunications transmission from a customer location, determining whether the telecommunications transmission is of a type which is to be handled by a cable television distribution network, and transferring the telecommunications transmission to a cable television distribution network only if the transmission is determined to be of the type which is to be handled by the cable television distribution network; and, a headend switch for receiving the telecommunications transmission and switching the transmission to a destination.

26. The system in accordance with claim 25, wherein the telecommunications transmission is an outbound telephone call.

27. The system in accordance with claim 25, wherein the bypass device comprises means for determining whether the telecommunications transmission is a long distance call or a local call.

28. The system in accordance with claim 25, wherein the telecommunications transmission is a data transmission.

29. The system in accordance with claim 25, wherein the bypass device comprises means for encapsulating an address associated with the customer into the telecommunications transmission.

30. The system in accordance with claim 25, wherein the bypass device comprises means for communicating with a headend switch.

31. A bypass device for bypassing a local exchange carrier network, comprising: means, connected to the local exchange carrier network and an alternate distribution network, for receiving a telecommunications transmission from a customer location; and,

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• means for receiving a signal indicative of whether the telecommunications transmission from the customer location is of a type which is to be handled by the local exchange carrier network or the alternate distribution network, and for switching the telecommunications transmission to the local exchange carrier network or to the alternate distribution network in accordance with the signal.

32. The bypass device in accordance with claim 31, wherein the alternate distribution network is a cable television distribution network.

33. The bypass device in accordance with claim 31, wherein the telecommunications transmission is a long distance telephone call and the signal is a signal generated by the dialing of a "1" on a telephone at the customer location.

34. A method for using an alternate distribution network to bypass a local exchange carrier network, comprising the steps of:  
receiving a telecommunications transmission from a customer location;  
using a data transmission protocol to transmit data representing the communications transmission from a customer location to a switch not on the local exchange carrier network, the data transmission protocol further comprising:  
a message layer containing the data representing the communications transmission; and,  
a routing layer containing delivery address destination data and data indicating the format of the data representing the communications transmission.

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